**Lecture: Choosing which emotion you wish to feel**

Chapter 13 Emotion covers a fascinating array of topics related to the experience and communication of emotion. This lecture focuses on the role cognition plays in emotion. The emotion we feel is the product of experiences and our interpretation of them. The central theme I am following here is to organize the information in a way that illustrates the role cognition, and therefore perception and choice, play in our experience of emotion. Read pp. 532-545 in Chap. 13 and watch the video in the Student Video Toolkit for Chap. 13: “Emotion + Arousal plus Interpretation” before reading this lecture. The textbook pages describe three emotions: fear, anger, and happiness. Notice how those emotions are influenced by the situation, our past experiences (learning and conditioning from Chap. 8), and how we interpret them (appraisal and beliefs which involve cognitive processes). In the video, the effects of a specific stimulus is influenced by our interpretation of it.

Our emotions are not totally determined by the situations we experience. We can have influence upon the emotion we will feel by the perspective we choose to take on it. If you do not like the emotion you feel, you can change it by changing your perspective on the situation.

**All emotion involves physiological arousal.** There are some differences in the details of finger temperature and areas of the brain that are most active, but overall emotion means we are experiencing arousal of the sympathetic component of the autonomic nervous system. We adapt to any steady state of stimulation (p.198) and intense emotion can only be maintained for a brief interval of time. We exhaust the neurotransmitters and hormones necessary for intense emotion and it begins to lower the physiological arousal and hence the experience of the emotion. But the intense arousal that accompanies strong emotion is an addictive experience for some of us and we may seek emotionally arousing experiences. This is called sensation-seeking in psychology and a survey has been developed to measure our tendency to seek arousal. You may find many forms of it by doing an Internet search for "Sensation Seeking Scale". The "Type T personality" seeks intense arousal as a life style. There is a survey for measuring our tendency to be a thrill seeker, but I have been unable to locate it on the Internet for us to review.

Adaptation to arousal is a problem when we try to remain happy or sad after an event precipitates either of these emotions. David Myers, our text's author, has published a book reviewing the measures of happiness and the factors that contribute to happiness. (See your text's reference section). He summarizes some the key points in the text and in Table 13.2 (p. 544). Happiness is an excellent example of how influence the emotion we feel through cognitive processes.

Money produces only fleeting happiness because we tend to adapt to our level of wealth and comfort. Studies of organizational psychology find that job satisfaction is only briefly helped by giving employees a raise. Employees with jobs that they perceive as challenging, meaningful, and that they play a very important role in performing tend to have high job satisfaction, do high quality work, and do not take sick leave or quit easily. The psychologist Csikszentmihalyi mentioned on p. 486 has written about the "flow" of experience that is so captivating when we are in it that we do not wish to quit what we are doing. When you are doing a challenging activity that has your total awareness, is not tiring even if requiring intense activity and concentration, and you feel your contributions to be very important to the outcome, you are "in the flow". Having many "flow" activities in your life that you are able to experience on a regular basis is associated with reported "happiness" along with other items mentioned in Table 13.2. Being a rich couch potato is not associated with reported happiness after the first year or so.

**Cognition influences emotion**

Genetics influences our of happiness and sadness "set levels", but does not determine the whole experience for most of us. Severe clinical depression and mania are probably nearly totally caused by physiological factors that appear to be genetic in origin, but that includes only a small percentage of people. The vast majority of us can choose our activities that produce satisfaction. Table 13.1 also notes that happiness is related to self-esteem, optimism, outgoingness, meaningful religious faith, sleep and exercise. The only other characteristic mentioned is close friendships and satisfying marriage and both are strongly correlated with our degree of psychological well-being in an interactive manner. They produce well-being, but those of us who are psychologically healthy tend to have strong relationships with others and are able to relate intimately.

**Examples of emotions influenced by cognitive schemas**

Each emotion has a group of cognitions or thoughts surrounding it, called a schema. Each of these cognitions has its origin in our experience either by reading or hearing about it in some form, or by directly experiencing it ourselves. For example, to be really depressed we need what is known as the "cognitive triad" of "I'm no good", I'll never be any good", and "there's nothing I can do about it." The word "I" can be replaced by "my life", or "the world" with equally depressing consequences. It takes all three of these legs to make a serious depression survive: negative self-judgment, hopelessness for things to get better in the future, and helplessness that I can do nothing to improve it. Change anyone of these legs (cognitive restructuring), or cognitions, and the depression begins to topple over. If I win the lottery, say three million dollars, I would be elated when I read those numbers and realized that I had them all! What a rush!! I would be happy forever because I can envision travel, new house, new car, great food, never have to clean house again, never have to worry about bills or losing my job. I could retire and take it easy, do only what I want to do. Am I happy? Yes!! Now by tomorrow I have learned that there were three winners, so I get one million. Still good, but a little disappointing to go from 3M to 1M. But if I had only heard I won 1M to begin with, I would have been extremely happy but relative deprivation sets in (p. 543) a cognitive process. Then I realize they will pay in 20 installments, one payment per year; that's $50,000 per year. Still pretty good money, but not super rich, just a lot better off than I am now. Certainly not eligible for food stamps. But now I learn I must pay taxes on the money each year - at least 28%. If I am still working and making some money, I could even pay a higher percentage. But at 28% I have about $36,000 left each year. Let's say it doubles my income from my employment. That's $72,000 per year! But if I married someone who worked in a good job they would make enough to give us that amount of income. In fact the average UW professor's salary is only a little below that and no one claims they are rich. If fact the Dean at my college makes about that and he struggles to make ends meet and pay for his kids to go to college. Now the phone rings and a relative who's been having a hard time financially lately and heard I just won the lottery; you can guess how many relatives and friends I may have contact me. I realize it's a no win situation now. If I try to help them out, I'll quickly give all my winnings away. If I refuse, I'll be seen as uncaring and selfish, and I'll feel guilty. Now my lottery winning emotional high has definitely begun to wane. People around me can't understand why I‘m not a changed man; I should be all smiles all the time, quit my job, never feel unhappy again. My interpretations of my situation have changed greatly since I saw those matching numbers. My changing emotions have been led by my changing interpretations of the situation, not the objective facts. The objective fact is that I have more money than I did before, but I do not see how this is going to make me happy through my life now that I have scanned the situation and developed a schema for my new situation: no better off than other people I know who struggle to make ends meet, needy people I want to help but can't without undoing my good fortune. Reality has nothing to do with how I feel; it's my perception of reality.

Another example illustrates the impact of perception and cognition. If you are hiking in the North Cascades National Park, come around a bend in the trail, and see a bear about 200 feet ahead on the trail, what emotion do you feel? Some would be very afraid and underlying that would be the cognition that bears are vicious animals and will hurt you if they can. You might decide to run away from there. Another person might believe bears are like teddy bears and this is a park, isn't it? So he approaches the bear to get a really good look and picture. Both of these people may get hurt by the bear, depending upon other characteristics in the situation. A third person enters this same scene and first decides if this is a black bear or grizzly because she knows there is a big difference between the two. The black bear is not usually very aggressive, but the grizzly is extremely aggressive and unpredictable. A grizzly might run away form you or charge you and eat you, or anything in between. But person #3 also knows to stand still and assess the situation, never run as that attracts grizzlies to run after you. She also notes the wind direction and looks for cubs. If this is a grizzly without cubs, and the wind is in the hiker's face, she may begin to feel less fearful and more joyful as she becomes fairly sure the bear does not know she is there. She knows grizzlies have very poor eyesight so probably can't see her at 200 feet. They have excellent sense of smell, but the wind is blowing away from the bear so the hiker's scent will not be detected. She gets her camera out, looks for a tree to climb if necessary because she knows mature grizzlies cannot climb trees usually, takes a picture or two, watches for a while, then slowly and quietly walks back the trail away from the bear. She has had a great experience because she knows that no one has yet positively confirmed the presence of grizzlies in the North Cascades ecosystem, and she has the first pictures that will do that. She is elated that the big bears are back and that she can show the National Park Service the evidence. What a day! Has she got stories to tell now! Our other two hikers are either dead from running away or harassing the bear, or so scared they don't ever want to hike again. Reality has nothing to do with the emotions experienced. The cognitive schemas each person held about the situation created the emotions. Schemas that are accurate with reality help one stay healthy and successful in the long run, but emotions may be caused by either accurate or inaccurate schemas.

**Choosing my emotions**

Each of my emotions has an underlying set of cognitions derived from my experience and perception. If I change my cognitions by more accurate learning, or realize that there are two ways to look at something, I become able to change my emotion. I can choose to keep a given feeling about a situation or look for evidence to adopt a different set of cognitions that will lead to different emotion. Once I become aware of the cognitions that underlay various emotions, I can choose different emotions by selecting different schemas to focus upon. I can be an optimist or pessimist depending the view of future I choose to hold. I can see the bucket half-full or half-empty. I can see the dark cloud or its silver lining. I can focus on the difficulties of my days or the valuable life experiences I am gaining that will have their benefit some day in the future. I can know that emotions come and go, life runs in cycles, the bad times will give way to the good and then to the bad times and them to the good times, so I shouldn't get too down right now with my troubles because "this too shall pass" and "it could be worse". I could read about people who had terrible times and then went on to great successes and happiness. Or I could assume it will certainly not happen for me and my is in the toilet with handle already pulled to flush.

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